





DEISM DISARMED;

OR A

SHORT ANSWER

TO

K PAINÉ'S AGE OF REASON,

ON PRINCIPLES SELF-EVIDENT, BUT
SELDOM PRODUCED.

Admit a God—that mystery supreme!
That cause uncaus'd! all other wonders cease;
Deny him—all is mystery besides;
Millions of mysteries! each darker far,
Than that thy wisdom would unwisely shun.
So weak our reason, and so great our God,
What most surprises in the sacred page,
Or full as strange, or stranger, must be true.

YOUNG.

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PREFACE.

THE design of this short Essay is not so much to defend revelation, as to disarm Deism. The credibility of the Gospel history, and the great truths of Christianity, have been so abundantly proved against the most able and artful of its adversaries, that scarcely any thing but fresh miracles could add to the evidence. These truths, however, though on a level with the simple and unbiassed mind, as appears from the miraculous propagation of the Gospel, are still to the Greeks and Greeklings foolishness. We often

hear the pert or sneering Deist hesitating a doubt of some of the most mysterious points of religion, and expecting a Christian should immediately enter on a defence of them, and remove every objection in a moment; and we sometimes see a Christian, in the simplicity of his heart, attempting to answer these objections, without ever availing himself of those retortions which must either immediately silence his adversary, or reduce him to Atheism. A real concern for the common cause of Christianity, and those great truths which constitute the essence of it, the Trinity, the Fall, and the Atonement, have induced the author to hint to the friends of revelation, though not the only, yet a most powerful way

of defending it. To such he must likewise observe, that the arguments he makes use of are only arguments *ad hominem*; they do not pretend to establish Christianity, but to silence its enemies. He thinks, that when once he has shown the Deist that his arguments prove too much, and that the mysteries of revelation ought to be no objection to a belief of them; when he has demonstrated, that, as rational creatures, we cannot remain Sceptics, but must decide in favour of some revelation, he then thinks that the cause of Christianity will need but little defence, as the evidence for the truth of it must be infinitely superior to every other. If this mode of defending Christianity should offend any sincere

and judicious Christian, the author
is ready to yield to sounder judge-
ments, and to submit his private
opinion to their decision.

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DEISM DISARMED,

&c. &c.

THOSE who are acquainted with controversy, know how much it is in the power of artful and eloquent writers *to make the worse appear the better reason*, and they will therefore lay but little stress on whatever is addressed to the imagination, or only floats on the surface of the dispute. To such I address the present short answer; and if it has not so much effect on the generality of my readers, as the *enticing words of man's wisdom*, I shall console my-

self in finding that even this circumstance is in some sort an evidence of my general system.

With all those proofs God has given of his existence, he has left several objections to it, which from time to time have led many men, men too who have called themselves philosophers, to doubt of it. He has left indelible marks of wisdom and power in the creation; marks sufficiently visible to those who are not blinded by false philosophy and depravity of heart; but he has not given every proof of his existence which he might have done: he has not written his name in the skies; he has not every day thundered it in the ears of men, nor struck those dead who have blasphemed his name and denied his being. We do not hear that Selius, in Martial, died a sudden or a miserable death.

Nullus esse Deos, inane cœlum
Affirmat Selius; probatque quod se
Factum, dum negat hæc videt beatum.

This conduct of the Deity, though mys-

terious and unaccountable on Deistical principles, I know is reconcilable to his infinite perfections; which I adore where I cannot comprehend. Nor let the Atheist triumph at this mystery in God's providence; for if on this account he denies the existence of a God, he will be reduced to many more incomprehensible mysteries, and at last to palpable contradictions. Some mysteries therefore we must believe, or be obliged to swallow others more mysterious; so that a believer of revelation is truly rational: as the mysteries he believes are less mysterious than those which the Atheist* or Deist believes. Yes; paradoxical as it may sound, these infidels deal

* The name of Atheist is odious; and strange, as it may seem, too bad even for the meridian of Paris; but the odium is easily avoided, and all the poison of it retained, by conveniently adopting the very general name of Deist. This word sounds well, but has as great a latitude of signification as the word Christian; and numerous as the sects of Christianity may be, I still think them fewer than those of Deism. From the Deities of Epicurus, who took no care of human affairs, to the God of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who communicated private inspirations about the publishing

more in mysteries than the Christian. The Atheist believes that all those instances of wisdom and contrivance, the adaptation of means to ends,

of every thing we see, is not the result of any intelligent author, and that these effects are without any correspondent cause. The Deist believes that God has suffered the whole world to be deceived by revelations; that these revelations have produced the most deplorable wickedness among mankind; that he has been the spectator of this wickedness for so many ages, without interposing such remedies as might remove them; and yet this Deist refuses to believe the Christian revelation, because it

of books, what an almost infinite number of sects ! Before a Christian therefore disputes with a Deist, he should demand his creed ; this the Deist will be often unable and always loth to comply with ; for this obvious reason, that he may attack the Christian without being liable to have his own arguments retorted on him.

was first given to an obscure people, is now received but by a small part of the world, and contains some truths not easily reconcilable to our ideas of the divine attributes. If God, says the Deist, had chosen to reveal his will, he would have done it in such a manner as to have convinced mankind beyond all power of doubting ; and if there is a God, says the Atheist, and he had desired that we should believe his existence, he would have made it impossible to call it in question, or he would have immediately punished those who were so daring as to deny it. But this false reasoning has its foundation in ignorance of human nature; the fall of man is a clue to the difficulty of both Atheist and Deist. Yes, gentlemen, smile as you please, I repeat it, the fall of man is a clue to the difficulty. If man had been perfect as he came out of the hands of his Creator, (I speak it with reverence) he would have had a right to expect such a demonstration of the existence of God as would have been as impossible to question as his own existence ; and such a re-

velation of his will, as would have precluded every objection, as much as his first command to our first parents in Paradise; but having forfeited his innocence, he became guilty and depraved, and involving his posterity in the same guilt and depravity, (do not triumph, gentlemen, too soon) they became unworthy and incapable of those original manifestations of the divine will, and left in a state of obscurity and ignorance, which it is impossible to account for on any other plan than the Christian. And does that account for it, say my antagonists? To whom I answer, why the posterity of Adam should be involved in the guilt of his sin, and inherit from him blindness, weakness, and depravity, is perhaps nearly as comprehensible

As that the virtuous son is ill at ease,
When the lewd father gave the dire disease,

POPE.

That the parent should convey distemper and mental derangement to the child is scarcely less mysterious than the doctrine of original

sin ; with this difference, that the latter tells us how this mystery came to pass, while the former leaves us entirely in the dark about it.

The Deist, I know, (for the Atheist is not deserving of an answer) will seek refuge in optimism, which is but another word for absurdity ; he will pretend prodigious zeal for the moral character of the Deity ; he will expatiate on the necessity of natural and moral evil to the very existence of virtue and happiness ; and will tell us, perhaps in the poetical but fallacious language of Pope, that

All discord's harmony not understood ;
All partial evil, universal good.
And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is is right.

ESSAY ON MAN.

This system, so beautifully versified by Pope, is the asylum of Deism ; his false reasoning and his contradictions are decorated with such brilliant flights of imagination, that our eyes are fixed on nothing

but the lace and fringe ; while the coarseness of the robe to which they are attached is entirely unregarded. This system, too, on a superficial view of it, has something in it so specious, that it is no wonder it is so generally received by superficial reasoners, especially when it pretends

To vindicate the ways of God to man.

This system, therefore, to which Deism is sure to retire when pressed by the Christian to account for natural and moral evil, deserves a particular consideration. This I shall endeavour to give it, divested of every thing that might cheat the mind to an acquiescence in words instead of things.

Whatever is, is right, is true respecting God; who cannot possibly do wrong, but cannot be true respecting man, otherwise man as well as God must always act rightly. " So he does," says the optimist, " with respect to the whole, for though " he may sometimes do evil, yet *partial* " *evil is general good.*" This position, re-

duced to clear ideas, is no more than saying that the evil of the smaller number conduces to the good of the greater ; or, in other words, that the evil of five conduces to the good of fifteen, and thus there is said to be good upon the whole. This reasoning may do very well in rhetoric, where a part is taken for the whole ; but in logic it does not deserve an answer : for the whole, in a strict philosophical sense, must mean all the parts, that is, every individual ; but if the evil of the smaller number contributes to the good of every individual, those individuals, who are doing evil, are, at the same time, procuring good for themselves as well as others ; and we must say, not only that the greater number derive good from the evil of the smaller, but that the smaller number acquire good to themselves by committing evil. Thus we see, to state the argument, is to expose its weakness ; and to understand it, is to confute it. Revelation, therefore, which Mr. Pope has scarcely once deigned to mention, will, perhaps, after all the philosophical and poetical apparatus of his

essay, be found to be the best vindication of the ways of God to man.

But some inquisitive reasoner may perhaps demand, have you no better way of defending revelation than by pulling down natural religion? Not so, I answer; my intention was only to shew that revelation had as good a foundation as natural religion; that it was liable to no more objections than natural religion, and was not in the least inconsistent with it; nay God seems to have left mysteries in natural religion, that it might be what St. Paul says of the Jewish law, *A schoolmaster to bring us to Christ*. If by the light of nature we could find an easy solution to the introduction and continuance of natural and moral evil; if there were no such mysteries as these in natural religion, I should never think of admitting the mysteries of revelation, and should declare in the words of a famous Socinian preacher, “*Where mystery begins religion ends.*” But when I look round the natural and moral world, and see mysteries at every point of view, to

refuse believing revelation on account of its mysteries, would be highly irrational, and finally lead me to Atheism.

Surrounded, therefore, by mysteries as we are, we need not be so anxious to solve every difficulty in revelation, and to rescue every obscure passage in Scripture from the cavils of its inveterate enemies. To defend the Christian cause against the attacks of Deism, it is fully sufficient to shew the Deist, that in order to defend himself against the Atheist, he must admit mysteries as great as those in Christianity. Instead of this retortion, which in sound logic must for ever silence the Deist, we generally find the Christian tugging at the labouring oar, by endeavouring to solve difficulties in Scripture, which God has left there for the exercise of our faith and submission. This I know will be called cant and bigotry by the superficial and inconsistent Deist; but I make this open challenge in the face of the world to all such, that when they have solved the difficulties that lie against the

moral attributes of God in the production of monsters, the propagation of diseases from parents to children, and on the subjecting of brutes to such dreadful natural evils as they sometimes undergo, I will undertake to remove every objection to Scripture, and to solve all the mysteries of revelation. The great apostle of optimism, Pope, has moved heaven and earth to solve the mysteries of natural religion; but a bare quotation of his reasons will shew his success.

But errs not nature* from this gracious end,
From burning suns when livid deaths descend,

* The word nature, which we so often hear used with so little precision, is admirably calculated by its ambiguity to favour the cause of Deism; but if we inquire into the precise meaning of it, we shall find that it contains one of those mysteries which ought the better to reconcile us to the mysteries of revelation. One of its most general significations (for, by an author who wrote expressly on the subject, it has eight different meanings) is *the regular course of things*. Now have things in their very essence this regular course? that is, do they of themselves fall into the order in which we see them, or are they directed in their course by some powerful intelligent being? The first of these

When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests sweep
 Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep ?
 " No, ('tis reply'd) the first Almighty Cause
 " Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws ;
 " Th' exceptions few ; some change since all began,
 " And what created perfect?"—Why then Man ?
 If the great end be human happiness,
 Then nature deviates, and can man do less?
 As much that end a constant course requires
 Of show'rs and sun-shine as of Man's desires ;
 As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,
 As men for ever temp'rare, calm, and wise.
 If plagues or earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,
 Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline?
 Who knows but he, whose hand the light'ning forms,
 Who heaves old Ocean, and who wings the storms,

supposition leads directly to Atheism ; and if the second be admitted, I would ask whether this regular course of things which we have personified by the word nature, and to which we have given the feminine gender, be such an agent in the hands of the Deity, as the director of a machine is in the works of art, or whether it is nothing but the very machine itself? If nature be the very machine itself, under the immediate direction of the Deity, it is difficult to suppose, " how nature erring from herself," as Shakespeare says, could ever produce a monster. This difficulty made Dr. Cudworth and Dr. Grew have recourse to plastic natures and vital principles to account for certain phenomena which seemed irreconcilable to the perfections of the Deity.

Pours fierce ambition in a Caesar's mind,
 Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind?
 From pride, from pride, our very reas'ning springs:
 Account for moral, as for nat'r'l things:
 Why charge we Heav'n in those, in these acquit?
 In both, to reason right, is to submit.

The beauties of this passage are so enchanting, as almost to disarm criticism, and make her forget the false reasoning it so artfully hides. But can there be a more pitiful defence of the rectitude of nature, when by pestilence and earthquakes whole nations are involved in ruin, than to tell us that she acts not by partial but by general laws? which reduced to such ideas as we can perfectly comprehend, implies that nature is a great machine, which in its operations produces good to fifteen, but evil to five.

If the great end be human happiness,
 Then nature deviates, and can man do less?

Here the poet thinks nature never intended that all men should be happy. If a Christian had adopted this opinion, what an outcry would have been raised against it!

This opinion of the poet is confirmed by the subsequent part of the passage :

If storms and tempests break not heav'n's design,
Why then a Borgia or a Catiline ?

But if moral evil enters into the design of heaven, it can only be for the sake of producing more moral good ; and this reduced to clear and distinct ideas, is only saying that either every individual, even Borgia and Catiline, will be more happy for the evil they have produced, or that their wickedness will produce the good of a greater number of individuals than if these miscreants had not existed ; that is, supposing the whole human race to be twenty, without Borgia and Catiline there would have been but fifteen happy ; but with them there will be seventeen. Thus we see by merely reducing the vague words *partial* and *general*, *few* and *whole*, to numerical ideas, we unmask the false notions they contain, and the delusion is apparent and palpable.

The conclusion of this beautiful passage,

From pride, from pride, our very reas'ning springs, &c.

This is perfectly just and truly philosophic; but if submission is right reasoning, and reasoning is pride, of what use is all this parade of argument to reconcile the phenomena of the natural and moral world with the attributes of the Deity? Such a concession comes very well from a Christian who believes in mysteries, but is quite incompatible with the dignity of a rational Deist, who refuses to believe in Christianity, because it is mysterious.

Thus we see no revelation is incredible, merely because it enjoins the belief of mysteries, and that the Christian revelation is, in that respect, just as credible as the religion of nature.

But it will be said, this retort upon the Deist may be made by the most absurd and ridiculous revelations in the

world. The religion of Brama in Hindostan, of Fo, in China, and of Xaca in Japan, may all plead the same arguments in defence of their several creeds, and are all, with respect to mysteries, upon the same ground as Christianity.

To which it may be answered, these religions ought not to be deemed false, merely because they contain mysteries, but because these mysteries contradict the analogy of nature, and are conveyed to us by no credible evidence. But the general course of nature, the actual situation of man, and the common ideas of the divine conduct towards him, all favour the belief of some communications of the Deity, besides those intimations we have of his will from a view of the creation: and surely it may be rationally concluded from this inclination to believe revelations, that there is something in the very nature of man that induces him to it; a general effect must have a correspondent cause as general to produce it; if therefore we find mankind in all ages prone to believe revelations, it must

arise either from their compatibility with the nature and expectations of man, or from the imbecility of his rational powers, which rendered him utterly incapable of detecting the falsehood of them ; either of these hypotheses are inimical to the cause of Deism, and both form a strong presumption in favour of revelation.

But how (it will be asked) are we to distinguish the Christian revelation from that multitude of pretended revelations, which are a disgrace to human nature, and an insult to the Deity ? This (it may be answered) is not the point in debate ; the object of this essay is not so much to establish Christianity as to confute Deism. Let the Deist once acknowledge that the Christian mysteries are no objection to their credibility, and then it will be time enough to defend the Christian revelation against every other. In the mean time it may be proved to a demonstration that it is our interest as well as our duty to adhere to some revelation, and particularly to such a revelation as teaches the immortality of the soul, and

the eternity of rewards and punishments. This the intelligent reader will understand has been already done to my hands by one of the sublimest geniuses in the world, (as Mr. Bayle calls him) Monsieur Pascal. His famous argument called the *Wager*, (the solidity of which is acknowledged, against the Abbé de Villars, by Mr. Bayle)* is levelled against Atheists and Sceptics, but is equally conclusive against those who doubt only of the immortality of the soul, or who believe only a temporary duration of rewards and punishments hereafter. And as Mr. Pascal's argument extends to some length, previous to a quotation of the passage as it stands in his thoughts, I shall endeavour to express the substance in fewer words.

There is no proportion between finite and infinite. Either there is a God or there is not: either the soul is immortal or it is not; either there are eternal rewards and punishments or there are not. If the

* See Bayle's Dictionary, under the article Pascal.

affirmative of these three propositions be true, my risk is infinite if I disbelieve them ; if they are false, I only lose certain gratifications in this life which are incompatible with the belief of them ; therefore if I act as rationally in this case as I should do in any of the important affairs of this world, I must certainly believe them ; and if this is not in my power, I ought to wish and endeavour to do so as much as possible.

“ Unity joined to infinity,” says Mr. Pascal, “ increases it not, any more than .“ a foot measure added to an infinite space.
 “ What is finite, vanishes before that
 “ which is infinite, and becomes pure no-
 “ thing. Thus our understanding, in re-
 “ spect of God’s ; thus human justice com-
 “ pared with the divine.

“ Nay, the disproportion between unity
 “ and infinity, in general, is not so vast
 “ as that between man’s righteousness, and
 “ the righteousness of God.

“ We know that there is an infinite,
“ but we are ignorant of its nature. For
“ instance; we know it to be false, that
“ numbers are finite: there must, there-
“ fore, be an infinity in number. But
“ what this is we know not. It can nei-
“ ther be equal nor unequal, because unity
“ added to it varies not its condition.
“ Thus we may very well know that
“ there is a God, without comprehending
“ what God is; and you ought by no
“ means to conclude against the existence
“ of God from your imperfect conceptions
“ of his essence.

“ For your conviction, I shall not call
“ in the testimony of faith, which gives
“ us so certain an assurance; nor even
“ make use of the ordinary proofs, be-
“ cause these you are unwilling to receive.
“ I shall argue with you only upon your
“ own terms; and I doubt not but, from
“ the method in which you reason every day
“ concerning things of the smallest import-
“ ance, to make it appear, after what man-
“ ner you ought to reason in the present

" case, and to which side you ought to
" incline, in deciding this question of the
" highest consequence, about the exist-
" ence of God. You alledge, then, that
" we are incapable of knowing whether
" God is. Yet this remains certain, that
" either God is, or is not; and that there
" can be no medium in the case. Which
" part then shall we chuse? Reason, say
" you, is not a proper judge in this point.
" There's an infinite gulph or chaos fixed
" between us: we play, as it were, at
" *cross and pile*, for an uncertainty thus
" infinitely distant. What will you wager?
" Reason can affirm neither the one nor
" the other event. Reason can deny nei-
" ther the one nor the other.

" Don't be forward, then, in accusing
" those of error and falsity who have al-
" ready chose their side. For you confess
" yourself not to know whether they have
" indeed acted imprudently, and made an
" ill choice. No, you will say, but I
" shall take the freedom to censure them
" still, not for making this choice, but

" for making any. He that takes *cross*,
" and he that takes *pile*, are both in the
" wrong; the right had been, not to wager
" at all.

" Nay, but there's a necessity of wager-
" ing; the thing is placed beyond the in-
" difference of your will; you are em-
" barked in the cause, and by not laying
" that God is, you, in effect, lay that he
" is not. Which will you take? Let us
" balance the gain and the loss of stick-
" ing to the affirmative. If you gain,
" you gain all; if you lose, it is mere no-
" thing that's lost. Be quick, therefore,
" and take this side without demur. Well,
" I confess, I ought to lay; but may not
" I lay too much? Supposing the chance
" to be the same, you would not refuse
" to stake one life against two. And in
" case there were ten for you to win, you
" must be much more imprudent not to
" hazard one life against ten, at a game
" where the cast was even. But here there's
" an infinite number of lives infinitely
" happy to be won, upon an equal throw;

“ and the stake you venture is so petty a
“ thing, and of so very short continu-
“ ance, that it would be ridiculous for
“ you to shew your good husbandry on
“ this occasion. For you say nothing,
“ when you urge that 'tis uncertain whe-
“ ther you win, and that 'tis certain you
“ must venture; and that the infinite
“ distance between the certainty of ven-
“ turing, and the uncertainty of winning,
“ makes the finite good, which you cer-
“ tainly expose equal to the infinite, which
“ you uncertainly pursue. This is all
“ deception: every gamester stakes what
“ is *certain* against what is *uncertain*;
“ and yet his venturing a finite certainty
“ for a finite uncertainty, never disparages
“ his reason. Again, it's false that there's
“ an infinite distance between the *certainty*
“ of what we venture, and the *uncertainty*
“ of what we hope to win. Indeed the
“ *certainty* of winning, and the *certainty*
“ of losing, are infinitely distant. But as
“ for the *uncertainty* on the winning hand,
“ it is such as fairly balanceth the *certainty*
“ of what we venture, according to the

“ usual proportion in games of chance;
“ Suppose, therefore, there are as many
“ chances on one side as on the other, the
“ game is even; and thus the certainty of
“ our venture is but equal to the uncer-
“ tainty of our prize: so far ought we to
“ be from supposing an infinite distance
“ between them. So that, on the whole,
“ if we stake a finite, where there's a
“ a plain equality as to winning or losing;
“ and where that which may be won is
“ infinite, the argument cannot but be
“ of infinite force. We seem here to
“ have a demonstration before us; and if
“ men are not incapable of all truth, they
“ cannot remain insensible of this.”

The result of this demonstration is, that as it is my interest to believe a God, the immortality of the soul, and the eternity of rewards and punishments, and as it is impossible my duty and my interest can be ultimately inconsistent, so it is my duty to adhere to these points as firmly as possible. A religion that only exhibits temporary rewards and punishments, however ratio-

nal, is not worthy my notice, when compared with another religion, which teaches rewards and punishments that are everlasting ; this may sound strange to some ears, but is a direct corollary from the foregoing premises, which I take to be nothing less than a demonstration.

It must however be remembered, that this reasoning is hypothetical. I have all along avoided a direct justification of Christianity, my main object being only a confutation of the unreasonableness of infidelity. The truth of the Christian revelation has exercised the deepest understandings and the finest pens in the world ; and while Bacon, Newton, Locke, Clarke, Des Cartes, Gassendus, Leibnitz, Bossuet, and Fenelon, have given such unequivocal proofs of their belief of Christianity, with what decency can we listen to such babblers as Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvetius, and their last miserable pupil, Paine ? Without therefore entering into a long detail of his sophisms, I shall suppose I have anticipated all his arguments, and that a very slight

survey of some of the most popular will be quite sufficient to his confutation.

His pompous declaration, that the creation we behold is the real and ever-existing word of God, that it proclaims his power, demonstrates his wisdom, and manifests his goodness and beneficence, this declaration, I say, will not be controverted by any one but an Atheist. Every thinking and reasoning mind will unequivocally confess that the creation we behold bears sufficient marks of wisdom, power, and beneficence to convince us that the author of it must be wise, powerful, and good ; but the poison of this declaration lies in an appearance of piety ; in such a swelling display of the attributes of the Deity in the creation, as leads us to suppose that a display of them in revelation is unnecessary. There is a piety in human nature, a certain *Theopathy*, as Dr. Hartley calls it, that is shocked at any derogation from the Deity, and which dwells with pleasure on his wisdom, power, and goodness ; this laudable propensity in man is addressed

with the greatest art by Deists when they wish to discredit the peculiar doctrines of revelation, such as the fall of man, and his redemption by the sufferings of Christ; but when the Sceptic objects to them the inefficacy of reason among the greatest part of mankind, which from the beginning of time has subjected them to be imposed on by the most ridiculous and sanguinary revelations; when he expatiates on the production of monsters, on hereditary diseases, the sufferings of brutes, and their destination to prey upon each other, when he displays the long catalogue of human woes, so beautifully and yet so terribly painted by Milton in his description of the Lazar house*, to what has the Deist recourse? Why either to optimism, which terminates in absurdity, or to mystery, which gives up the cause to Christianity.

This dilemma I leave Mr. Paine to escape as well as he can; he may fill as many pages as he pleases with the difficult-

* Paradise Lost, Book XI. v. 477:

ties and seeming contradictions of Scripture; but till he has got over these difficulties and seeming contradictions in nature, he will be just where he was, and Christianity will remain perfectly uninjured.

But though I do not enter upon a solution of the difficulties in Scripture, it must not be inferred that I think them incapable of a solution; some of the greatest, at the first appearance, vanish upon a nearer inspection; and it were to be wished that those who are so fond of objecting them would take the trouble to read what has been answered.

His misrepresentations of Scripture, in order to turn it into ridicule, are innumerable. Who, without indignation, mixt with pity, can observe his ignorance of the common distinction of the prophets into the greater and the lesser, by supposing that these terms were generally understood to mean degrees of inspiration? Who can forgive the disingenuity of saying, there were but eight or nine witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, when

the same authority which tells us of these witnesses, assures us that he was seen by above five hundred of the brethren at once? But as this fact, he says, was required to be believed by all, the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all, and universal. And when he will tell me why God suffered so many ages and nations to be deceived with this imposture, why there should be so many ages of blindness and absurdity before the present age of reason, and why Mr. Paine and the French philosophers should have so large a portion of reason, and the rest of the world so little, I will tell him why God did not permit the resurrection and ascension of Christ to be as public as the sun at noonday to all Jerusalem and all the world.

Suppose that in this boasted Age of Reason a Sceptic were to criticise this distinctive faculty of man in the same captious manner as the Deist does the Scripture, would he not have ample scope for raillery, and a large field for the display of his arguments against the obscurity, imbecility, and inefficacy of human reason? Where,

he might say, is the clearness of this guide, which leads men into such different and opposite opinions, that, as Cicero observes, there never was system so absurd that had not some philosopher for its patron? Where is the force of reason, he might add, if it has not enlightened us till the present age? And where, he might conclude, is its efficacy, if it has had so little influence on the conduct of man as history everywhere informs us has been the case? How did Bayle puzzle all the divines and philosophers of the latter end of the last century with his question on the Origin of Evil! And how did the acute and ingenious Berkley put the Atheists and Freethinkers to a stand by his arguments against the existence of matter! Hume, who was very little concerned about the tendency of his argument, has given us, in the character of a Sceptic, a shocking picture of the blindness of human reason, on those very subjects, too, where our ideas seem the most clear and precise.

“ The chief objection” says he, “ a-
“ gainst all *abstract* reasonings is deriv’d

“ from the nature of space and time,
“ which in common life, and to a careless
“ view, seem very clear and intelligible ;
“ but when they pass through the scrutiny
“ of the profound sciences (and they are
“ the chief object of these sciences) af-
“ ford principles and notions full of ab-
“ surdity and contradiction. No priestly
“ *dogmas*, invented on purpose to tame
“ and subdue the rebellious reason of man-
“ kind, ever shock'd common sense more
“ than the doctrine of the infinite divisi-
“ bility of extension, with its conse-
“ quences ; as they are pompously dis-
“ play'd by all geometricians and meta-
“ physicians, with a kind of triumph and
“ exultation. A real quantity, infinitely
“ less than any finite quantity, containing
“ quantities infinitely less than itself, and
“ so on, *in infinitum* ; this is an edifice so
“ bold and prodigious, that it is too
“ weighty for any pretended demonstra-
“ tion to support, because it shocks the
“ clearest and most natural principle of
“ human reason. But what renders the
“ matter more extraordinary is, that these
“ absurd opinions are supported by a chain

“ of reasoning, the clearest and most na-
“ tural ; nor does it seem possible for us
“ to allow the premises, without admit-
“ ting the consequences. Nothing can
“ be more convincing and satisfactory than
“ all the conclusions concerning the pro-
“ perties of circles and triangles ; and yet,
“ when these are once receiv'd, how can
“ we deny, that the angle of contact be-
“ twixt a circle and its tangent is infinitely
“ less than any rectilineal angle, that as
“ you may increase the diameter of the
“ circle *in infinitum*, this angle of contact
“ becomes still less, even *in infinitum*, and
“ that the angle of contact betwixt other
“ curves and their tangents may be infi-
“ nitely less than those betwixt any cir-
“ cle and its tangent, and so on, *in infini-*
“ *tum*? The demonstration of these prin-
“ ciples seems as unexceptionable as that
“ which proves the three angles of a tri-
“ angle to be equal to two right ones ;
“ tho' the latter opinion be natural and
“ easy, and the former big with contra-
“ diction and absurdity. Reason here
“ seems to be thrown into a kind of a-

" mazement and suspence, which, without the suggestions of any Sceptic, gives her a diffidence of herself, and of the ground she treads on. She sees a full light, which illuminates certain places; but that light borders upon the most profound darkness. And betwixt these she is so dazzled and confounded, that she scarce can pronounce with certainty and assurance concerning any one object."

But notwithstanding the seeming contradictions in these conclusions of reason, there is no one but he who has taken great pains to be wrong that will from hence infer that reason is a hurtful or a useless gift of God. Reason, properly attended to, will always point at something beyond her. She will ever, like (I had almost said the divine) Socrates, expect instruction from Heaven, and, by a confession of her weakness, show her real strength.

If reason be so confessedly blind and weak on natural subjects, where there is

no interest to mislead her, what can we expect from her on moral subjects, where the passions have so forcible an influence? This we may learn from Pope, who, when he paints life and manners, and the various operations of the heart, is as excellent, as he is weak and inconsistent when he reasons and theologizes.

As man, perhaps the moment of his breath,
Receives the lurking principle of death:
The young disease, that must subdue at length,
Grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength:
So, cast and mingled with his very frame,
The mind's disease, its ruling passion came;
Each vital humour which should feed the whole,
Soon flows to this, in body and in soul.
Whatever warms the heart, or fills the head,
As the mind opens, and its functions spread,
Imagination plies her dang'rous art,
And pours it all upon the peccant part.
Nature its mother, habit is its nurse;
Wit, spirit, faculties, but make it worse;
Reason itself but gives it edge and pow'r;
As heav'n's blest beam turns vinegar more sour.
We, wretched subjects tho' to lawful sway,
In this weak queen, some fav'rite still obey.
Ah! if she lend not arms, as well as rules,
What can she more than tell us we are fools?
Teach us to mourn our nature, not to mend,
A sharp accuser, but a helpless friend!

Or from a judge turn pleader, to persuade
 The choice we make, or justify it made ;
 Proud of an easy conquest all along,
 She but removes weak passions for the strong.

In this beautiful passage we see the true source of human infirmity, the prevalence of the passions, and how small a share our weak reason has in regulating them. We have from the same inimitable pen a picture of man as just as it is frightful when we view him only in his present state, but at the same time such a picture as the Christian revelation, and no other, acknowledges.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
 The proper study of mankind is man.
 Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
 A being darkly wise, and rudely great :
 With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
 With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
 He hangs between—in doubt to act or rest,
 In doubt to deem himself a God or beast ;
 In doubt his mind or body to prefer,
 Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err ;
 Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
 Whether he thinks too little, or too much ;
 Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd ;
 Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd ;

Created half to rise, and half to fall;
 Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
 Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
 The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

This picture of man, so admirably versified by Pope, was originally drawn by the sublime and penetrating Pascal, whose admirable *Thoughts* shew a depth and justness of thinking capable of convincing the most obdurate unbeliever, if conviction were necessarily the result of reason and argument; but when the will is perverse, and the gratification of the vicious passions in the contrary scale, who, that knows human nature, can doubt which will preponderate?

“ Might we see but a miracle (say some
 “ men)” [it is Mr. Pascal that speaks]
 “ how gladly would we become converts?
 “ They could not speak in this manner,
 “ did they understand what conversion
 “ means: they imagine, that nothing else
 “ is requisite to this work, but the bare
 “ acknowledgment of God; and that his
 “ adoration and service consists only in

“ the paying him certain verbal addresses,
“ little different from those which the
“ heathens used towards their idols. True
“ conversion is to abase, and, as it were,
“ to annihilate ourselves, before this great
“ and sovereign Being, whom we have
“ so often provoked, and who every mo-
“ ment may, without the least injustice,
“ destroy us: 'tis to acknowledge, that
“ we can do nothing without his aid, and
“ that we have merited nothing from him
“ but his wrath: 'tis to know that there's
“ an invincible opposition between God
“ and ourselves; and that without the
“ benefit of a mediator, there could be no
“ transaction or intercourse between us.”

Upon the whole, therefore, we may conclude that the great and general truths of Christianity have come down to us from the first ages, with an evidence sufficient to convince the well-disposed, but not to silence the cavils of determined unbelievers. I am well convinced that no weapon formed against Zion shall prosper; no Dagon shall stand before the ark of God; no false reli-

gion shall ever have an evidence equal to the true, our very enemies being judges; but by the mysterious, yet adorable, economy of providence, certain difficulties and obscurities are left in the Scriptures, and in the church, for the exercise of our submission and obedience, of our humility and patience; which difficulties and obscurities are perhaps the only criteria of that docility of mind, of that attachment to God, which could have no place if the truths of religion were as self-evident as our own existence. This truth has been very ably illustrated by Dr. Blair, in his sermons on the *Obscurity of a Future State*, and our *Ignorance of the Ways of God*; and every difficulty in which revelation is concerned, is so amply discussed by Butler in his *Divine Analogy*, that no English Deist deserves a hearing who has not read that work. Thus have I ventured, perhaps rashly, to engage in defence of that religion which, with all the evils it has innocently occasioned, has produced more real knowledge, virtue, and benevolence, than every other system put together;

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and though abler champions will; I doubt not, come forward to oppose this new and grand rebellion against Christianity, I will shout for the armies of the living God, and adore those dispensations of providence which I cannot comprehend.

THE END.

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